



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

NEWS RELEASE

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October 30, 2003
ID03-14

SERVICE SOLICITS COMMENT ON SLICKSPOT PEPPERGRASS CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENT AND "BEST AVAILABLE INFORMATION" DOCUMENT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today published a Notice of Availability (NOA) for a *Lepidium papilliferum* (slickspot peppergrass) Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) and "Best Available Information for Slickspot Peppergrass" document.

The Service is seeking public review and comment on both documents. The public comment period closes on November 14, 2003. It is not necessary to resubmit comments already provided during the previous comment periods (July 15, 200 for the proposed rule and July 15, 2003 for areas of substantial disagreement).

The CCA is a document authored by representatives from the Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation and other state agencies, the Idaho Army National Guard, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and several private landowners who hold grazing permits on BLM-managed and maintained lands, referred to as the Cooperating Parties. The CCA commits the Cooperating Parties to implementing conservation measures to prevent and minimize threats to slickspot peppergrass. "The CCA represents an innovative effort on the part of the State of Idaho, the Idaho Army National Guard, private landowners, and federal agencies for promoting the conservation of slickspot peppergrass," said Jeff Foss, Field Supervisor of the Service's Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office.

The "Best Available Information for Slickspot Peppergrass" (Available Information) document was prepared by the Service. This document contains updated information on the species since it was proposed for listing in July of 2002 as endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

The Service will consider a variety of information in its final listing determination for slickspot peppergrass, including these two documents, other formal conservation efforts, and additional data related to the plant's status and threats. Foss noted, "We want to ensure that the most accurate biological information is considered by the Service in its listing decision for slickspot peppergrass." The final listing determination will be made by the Service on January 15, 2004.

Information may be submitted to: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office, Attn: Jeff Foss, Field Supervisor, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Boise, Idaho 83709. E-mail comments should be submitted in ASCII file format with no encryption or special characters to: fw1srbocomment@fws.gov. A name and return address must appear in the e-mail message, as well as the subject line: "LEPA Comments." Comments may also be faxed to (208) 378-5262, Attn: Jeff Foss, Field Supervisor; include name, return address information, and the subject line: "LEPA Comments."

The NOA is published in today's issue of the *Federal Register*. Copies of the CCA and the "Best Available Information on Slickspot Peppergrass" document are available at the Service's Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709, (208) 378-5243, in CD and hard copy format.

The CCA and Available Information document will be available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours, at the Service's Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office. The documents will also be posted on the Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office website: <http://idahoes.fws.gov>.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 542 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.